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IV

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO KEATS

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TABLE OF THE NEW SYMBOLS USED

(1) *a* = the *a* of *father* (this is the true Romance A).
a = the *a* of *hat.*

(2) *a͡* = the *a* in *almighty.*

(3) *aw* = the same sound which occurs as *au* or *aw* in *autumn* and *awl.*

(4) *ɛ* = the *e* of *bed.* Only used so far in needful alleviation of wrong use of *a.*

(5) *a* or (6) *a͡y* = the *a* of *slave.* This symbol is made by a ligature of the two vowels which compose the sound; viz. the *ɛ* of *bed* and the *i* of *in,* as they appear in the words *rein* and *they*: such correctly spelt words are of course left unchanged. The modification of this sound before *r,* as in *various,* will be a rule of pronunciation, as also the effect of *qu* and *w* on the following vowel, e.g. *war,* etc., are unchanged.

(9) *i* for the diphthongal sound in *eye* and *right.*

(10) *a͡w* as in *how.*

(14) *o* as in *oh.*

(15) *g* 'hard' G.

(16) *ŋ* for the modified *n* in *-ing*.

Note: The reader is reminded that inconsistencies must occur in avoiding the confusion which would arise from using the symbols in words which require other new symbols to complete them. Such words are left in their old dress until they can be completely provided. Also note that the final *e* which is always mute, except in a few foreign words, is omitted where its presence would wrongly imply the lengthening of the preceding vowel, as in *liv, hav, passag, colleg,* but note *depre-ciate*, where *a* is long. This simple advantage can-not be made use of in words where the preceding vowel is mis-spelt, as in *dove*.

Capitals are not dealt with and illustrative quotations are given in the original spelling.

Any oversights in the text will not affect the purpose of the experiment.

Proper names unchanged: but the correct *a* is generally used, as in *Peona*, as it will not be re-marked by the reader.

Mute *e* in past participles represented by an

apostroph not only in *remember'd*, etc., but now also in *attȝr'd, compos'd, dar'd, denȝ'd,* etc.

u omitted after *g*, when mute, as *disgȝse.*

N.B. *through* spelt *thru'*
though „ *tho'*
thought „ *thawht*
because unalter'd.

IV

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO KEATS

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

I

IF *one English poet might be recall'd to-day from the dead to continue the work which he left unfinish'd on earth, it is probable that the crown of his country's desire would be set on the head of* JOHN KEATS, *for he was smitten down in his youth, in the very maturing of powers, which, having already produced work of almost unrivall'd beauty, held a promis of incredible things.*

HAD *his marvellous genius fully matured, it is impossible to surmise what* KEATS *might not hav done: but concerning the poetry that he has actually left us, the general verdict is that, while the best of it is of the highest excellence, the most of it is disappointing.* NOR *is this judgment likely to be overset, altho' some may always unreservedly admire him on account of his excellences,—and this because his fault is often the excess of a good and rare quality,—and others again as unreservedly depreciate him on account of that very want of restraint, which in his early work, besides its other immaturities, is often of such a nature as to be offensiv to good taste and very provocativ of impatient condemnation.*

Amoŋ Keats' poems, too, a quantity of indifferent and bad verse is nau printed, not only from a reverence for his first volume, which he never reviṣ'd, and which is very properly reprinted as he issued it, but alṣo from a feelin which editors hav had, that since enythiŋ miġht be of value, everythiŋ was; ṣo that eny ṣcrap of his which coud be recover'd has gon into the collections. Concerniŋ which poor ṣtuff we mey be conṣol'd to know that Keats himṣelf would hav had no care; for, not to ṣpeak of what was pleinly never intended for poetry at alṣl, he ṣeems to hav regarded at leaṣt his earlier work as a mere product of himṣelf and the circumṣtances, nau good nau bad, its quality dependiŋ on influences beyond his control and often adverṣe, under which he alṣways did his beṣt. On one point only was he ṣenṣitiv, and that was his belief that he ṣometiġmes did well, and would do better. The feilures he left as they were, haviŋ too much priġde to be aṣham'd of them, and too ṣtroŋ a conviction of an ever-flowiŋ, and, as he felt, an increaṣiŋ and betteriŋ inṣpiration, to think it worth whiġle to ṣpend freṣh tiġme in reviṣiŋ what a younger moment had caṣt off.

The purpoṣ of this eṣṣey is to examin Keats' more important poems biġ the hiġhest ṣtandard of excellence as works of art, in ṣuch a manner as mey be both uṣeful and

interesting; to investigate their construction, and by naming the faults to distinguish their beauties, and set them in an approximate order of merit; also, by exhibiting his method, to vindicate both the form and meaning of some poems from the assumption of even his reasonable admirers that they have neither one nor other. Within *the limits of an introductory chapter this cannot be done, even imperfectly, without omitting much which the reader may look for in an account of* Keats' *poetry, but such omissions can be easily supplied: a knowledge, too, of the circumstances of* Keats' *life will be assumed,*[1] *and some acquaintance with his letters to his friends; and since these make of themselves a most charming book, and one that can never be superseded as a commentary on his work in its personal aspect, this view of the subject will here be disregarded except when required to aid the criticism or interpretation of a poem.*

I shall take the poems in what seems the most convenient order for my purpose, and shall not trouble the reader with any other artificial connection, reserving general remarks till the end. The *worser pieces I shall not notice at all.*

[1] Mr. *Sidney Colvin's* Life of Keats, *in the* English Men of Letters *series, supplies all these desiderata most satisfactorily.*

II.

ENDYMION

ENDYMION *is* Keats' *longest poem. It is the story of how* Cynthia, *the moon-goddess, who is also herself the moon, fell in love with the mortal* Endymion. 'A *great trial of invention', wrote* Keats, *for he had 'to fill 4000 lines with one bare circumstance.' When he compos'd the poem, he was in a state of mental excitment varied by fits of depression; he grew tir'd of it, had a poor opinion of it, and in his preface describ'd it as a feverish attempt.*

To *one who expects to be carried on by the interest of a story, this poem is tedious and unreadable, and parts of it merit at least some of the condemnation which fell on the whole.* Keats *thavht to 'surprise by a fine excess'; his excess rather confuses and blurs, and it is a severe task to keep the attention fix'd.* A *want of definition in the actual narration,—so that important matters do not stand avt,—a same-ness in the variety, and the reiteration of languid epithets, are the chief cavse of this; and in the second book, whare* Endymion *is wandering in strange places, the uncertainty as to whare he is, in the absence of explanatory*

statment as to what is intended, reduces the reader to despeir. And yet it is a marvel how even such faults as these can hav obscured so completely the poetic excellences from a more general recognition. I shall giv a short analysis of the outward events of the poem, such as the reader may find useful both as a gide and for reference or index, and will add some explanation of the allegory. But first with respect to the allegory I would say this, that the minor characters and incidents are so numerous and so yielding to various interpretation, that for the sake of brevity and simplicity I must confine miself to the mein points, without which there is no sense in the whole; and since, even with these, the mere putting their explanation into definit statment cannot be done without throwing the whole temporarily out of focus, I am the more content to neglect those lesser matters, in which the poet should be regarded as having, in his own words, 'let himself go from some fine starting-point towards his own originality'; nor would I wish to represent the poem other than he meant it, 'a little region in which lovers of poetry may wander' at their will.

ANALYSIS OF *ENDYMION*

BOOK I.—ON THE EARTH

1. *Author's prolog, 1-62.

2. Festival of Pan on Latmos, 63-406. [Endymion enters, 168; *Ode to Pan, 232-306.]

3. Peona takes E. to her bower, 407-515. [Address to Sleep, 453-463.] E. tells of his vision of an unknown goddess among the poppies—he dreamt he was asleep, 516-710. Peona rallies him on his love, 710-768. E. replies with his *argument on the meaning of Love, 769-857, and gives an account of a second, 893, and third, 963, meeting with the same vision, to end of book.

BOOK II.—WANDERINGS UNDER THE EARTH

1. *Prolog on supremacy of love above heroism, etc., 1-43.

2. E., while enjoying the pleasures of nature, reads a message on a butterfly's wings, 43-63. The butterfly leads him to a nymph, who foretells his wanderings and ultimat success, 64-130. E. meditats on the disappointment of desire, and prays to Cynthia as his especial goddess, but not recognis'd as his visitant; and receives answer bidding him descend into the silent mysteries of earth, 131-214.

He *obeys, 218.* Description *of an underworld of gems, 219-280.* E. *feels horror of solitude, and wishes to return to the earth.* He *comes to a temple of* Diana, *his goddess, and prays* Diana *to deliver him from the underworld, 281-332.* Flowers *spring out of the marble, 333-350.* He *goes on to soft music, 351-363.* Is *tortured by the music, 364-375.* Comes *to a lightsome wood of myrtles, 376-386.*

3. Description *of* Adonis, *387-427.* The *waking of* Adonis, *428-533.* Venus *encourages* E., *and enjoins secrecy, 534-587.*

4. E. *follows a diamond balustrade thru' waterworks to a gloom whare he sees* Cybele, *588-649.* Balustrade *breiks off, and he goes on an eagle to a jasmin bower, whare he soliloquises, 649-706.* Cynthia *comes unknown to him in bower, 707-827, and leaves him asleep, 853.*
[*The *poet speaks of the mystery of his legend, 827-853.*]

5. E. *wakes to melancholy thawht, and strays to a grotto whare he sees* Alpheus *and* Arethusa*—he prays for them, 854-1017.* He *goes altogether under the sea, -1023.*

BOOK III.—UNDER THE SEA

1. *Prolog *on regalities and supremacy of the* Moon, *1-71.*

2. A moonbeam reaches E. under sea, 72-102, and shines on him till morning, 102-119. [Description of sea-floor, 119-141.] [*Address to the Moon, 142-187.]

3. He meets with Glaucus and Scylla, 187-1027. Neptune's hall, 866-887. Venus cheers E., 887-923. Neptune's feast, 924-937. Hymn to Neptune, 943-990. Nereids carry off E., 1005-1018. E. hears a heavenly voice promising to take him up, 1019-1027.

4. E. finds himself back on the earth, 1028-1032.

BOOK IV.—IN THE AIR

1. Prolog to English Muse, 1-29.

2. E. finds a beautiful Indian maid beweiling her loneliness. He falls in love with her, 30-330. [Her song, 146-290.] And accompanies her in the air on flying horses, 330. *Vision of Sleep journeying, 367-397. E. and Indian sleep on the sleeping horses, 398. Cynthia appears to E. as the Moon, 430. The Indian disappears, -512. *Cave of quietude described, 512-562. Diana's feast and hymn to D., 563-611.

3. In midst of hymn E. is borne to Latmos again, and finds thare and addresses the Indian lady, 611-797. [The poet speaks, 770-780.]

4. Peona reappears, and by the identification of the

Moon, Cynthia, and the Indian lady as one, the tale concludes, -1003.

In so far as the poem has an inner meaning, Endymion must be identified with the poet as Man. The Moon represents 'Poetry' or the Ideality of desired objects, The principle of Beauty in all things: it is the supersensuous quality which makes all desired objects ideal; and Cynthia, as moon-goddess, crowns and personifies this, representing the ideal beauty or love of woman: and in so far as she is also actually the Moon as well as the Indian lady,—who clearly represents real or sensuous passion, —it follows that the love of woman is in its essence the same with all love of beauty; and this proposition and its converse will explain much that is otherwise strange and difficult. Allegory of Endymion

Man in Keats' poem begins with a desire for excellence, renown, and fame, and connects the Moon with his passion, iii. 142 seq., that is, he sees beauty or 'poetry' or ideality in his desire. This Ideality, assuming the form of the goddess, that is, of woman, which it is,[1] makes him renounce ambition and pursue poetic love. Next he has to humanise the ideality of his passion; and this General meaning

[1] The absolute identification must be intended in iv. 430, etc.

comes about by his contact with the mystery of life, and by sympathy with dead lovers' tragedies; and this sympathy leaves him a prey to real sensuous passion. In this *he falls, as he thinks, from his faith; and his sensuous passion, coming into sudden contact with his old ideals, vanishes at one moment quite away, and leaves him a prey to utter despair, iv.* 507 seq.*; and he is at discord with himself, until he unexpectedly discovers that his real and ideal loves are one and the same.*

The *circumstance that ideal beauty, if it is the* Moon, *is represented as falling in love with man, merely implies selection or election, and narrows down the application of the allegory to those men who feel supernatural visitations* (End. *i.* 795), *such as are the* Visionaries *of the* Revision of Hyperion. *Also, to follow* Keats' *meaning, it must not be lost sight of that when* Endymion *is visited by* Cynthia, *he never recognises her to be the* Moon,[1] *although her advent was heralded by 'the loveliest moon', etc., i.* 591. The *identity is not reveal'd to him till* Book IV. 430, *etc.; and so, when he finds himself loving both* Cynthia *and the* Indian *lady at the same time, he remembers his first love, the* Moon, *as distinct from them, and says that*

[1] *See i.* 606, 894, 943-959; *ii.* 128, *esp.* 168-195, *and* 302-332, 576, *esp.* 686 seq., *and* 739, 753; *iii.* 175, *etc.*, 913-914.

he has a triple *soul. There is no doubt about this, and it seems to me one of the two keys to the allegory.* That *it has escap'd the attention of diligent readers is a proof that it is not insisted on with sufficient clearness in the poem, and it is a good example of the lack of definition in the presentation of* Keats' *main designs.*

Symbolism of the Moon

Keats was not making an allegory, but using a legend, and he never, so far as I know, stated that he intended his poem for an allegory (unless this is implied in ii. 838–9), so that it may naturally shock the reader to find the Moon *identified with such an abstraction as* the principle of beauty in all things. *But as a matter of fact, the symbolism may be arrived at in the simplest way: the poet was very sensible to the mysterious effects of moonlight,*[1] *and felt the poetry of nature more deeply under that influence; and, that mood being given, one step further only is necessary, which is that other ecstatic and poetic moods should*

[1] *And see* Wordsworth's *two* Odes to the Moon:

> *O still beloved! for thine, meek* Power, *are charms*
> *That fascinate the very babe in arms.*

And, better, Guy de Maupassant:

'*Pourquoi ces frissons de cœur, cette émotion de l'âme? . . . A qui étaient destinés ce spectacle sublime, cette abondance de poésie jetée du ciel sur la terre? . . . Dieu peut-être a fait ces nuits-là pour voiler d'idéal les amours des hommes.*'

be likèn'd to it, and the conditioning cause of the first, which is known, be taken for a symbol of the other unknown causes, or of that which is common to all. This *is, I think, the other chief key to the sense, and it makes the difficult passag in* End. *iii. 142-187 (and see especially lines 163-169) intelligible and plein; and the poem becomes, with these explanations, readable as a whole, suggestiv of meaning, and full of shadowy outlines of mysterious truth.*

Scheme of the Poem

The general scheme of the poem is bravd and simple. The *four books, following the common formula of mystic initiation 'by the terrors of* Fire, *of* Water *and* Air' *(see the* Analysis*), correspond with the four elements—I.* Earth; *II.* Fire*—for it is more probable that this element has been somewhat obscured in the 'gleaming melancholy' of its necessary modifications than that it was not intended in its proper home beneath the earth's crust;*[1] *III.* Under sea = Water; *IV.* Air; *and these typify respectivly—I.* Natural beauty; *II.* The mysteries of earth; *III.* The secrets of death; *IV.* Spiritual freedom and satisfaction. The *first idea needs little comment: the last three books are concern'd with states of mind which, on his own con-*

[1] *See the initial description, in which* Vulcan *is mention'd, II. 231, and the grat use of gems.*

fession, lȳ beyond the poet's experience; and here he must be regarded as a searcher for truth rather than as full prophet. What *the mysteries of earth are will appear in the explanation of* Sleep and Poetry. *Their region 'beneath in the earth' is moonless,* i.e., *unlovely, and oppresses* Endymion *with the horror of solitude; but even here he fīnds a cold shrīne to* Diana *and immortal bowers of beauty; and at last the mysteries flush into love, and he holds unexpected communion with* Cynthia *herself.* After *this 'the blank amazements amaze no more', and he meets with* Alpheus *and* Arethusa. The *reason for the choice of this legend is very clear; they are two lovers, who, like* Endymion *himself, hav left the earth, and are pursuing their passion undergrownd, whence they are destin'd, as he too is, to arrīve again at the upper aer thru' the sea.* So *in the third book the story of* Glaucus *and* Scylla *has a similar fitness.* Glaucus *is a mortal, who, of his own curiosity and instinctiv desīre, has plung'd strȳht into the 'secrets of* Death' *from the world of natural beauty, whare he was living on the brink of them.* Scylla *mȳ hav done the same; but the general meaning of this third book I am not at all able to supplȳ.* The *region is one whare the moonbeams can reach, and the phenomena of earth's dȳ and nīght are dimly seen.* The *secrets of* Death *are in some*

wy connected with magic, of which thare are two kinds—the first, the earthly magic or witchcraft of Circe, *who is 'arbitrary queen of sense', and can gratify the sense but not resolve the secrets of* Death, *whose evil power she seems rather to eid; and the second a serious magic, which* Glaucus *has to learn before he can win redemption from* Circe's *curse.* The *meaning of the secrets of* Death *is probably the same as the imagination in* Rev. of Hyperion (*q.v.*), *but whether* Glaucus *is a visionary who livs entirely in the past (see* End. *iii. 327-337, 122, etc.), or whether* Death *has a more realistic meaning, or whether, as is not impossible, the two ideas are combin'd, I cannot gess.* It *seems intended that the sorrow of the secrets of* Death *can only be surmounted and their magic resolved by a soul who* Idea of woman *has been in perfect communion with ideal beauty, and has traced her presence thru' the whole of creation.* This *episode of* Glaucus *and* Scylla, *bk. iii from line 188 onwards, may be omitted at first reading, and it must always, tho' most consecutiv in narration, please the least, even tho' a key should be found for it.* Of *the four books, of almost equal length, the fourth reads by far the shortest.*

As *for the beauties of the poem, they are innumerable, and the reader will find them for himself, if he will be patient with the defects that so curiously hide them.* Of *these I*

would say no more here, if they did not very many of them depend on a lamentable deficiency in Keats' *art, which, while it affects much of his work, is brought into unusual prominence by the subject of* Endymion*; and that is his very superficial and unworthy treatment of his ideal female characters. It may be partly accounted for thus:* Keats' *art is primarily objective and pictorial, and whatever other qualities it has are as it were added on to things as perceived; and this requires a satisfactory pictorial basis, which, in the case of ideal woman, did not exist in* Keats' *time.* Neither the Greek nor the Renaissance *ideals were understood, and the thin convention of classicism, which we may see in the works of* West *and* Canova*, was played out; so that the rising artists, and* Keats *with them, finding 'nothing to be intense upon', turn'd to nature, and produced from* English *models the domestic-belle type, which ruled thru' out the second quarter of the century, degrading our poets as well as painters. It was* banal*, and the more ideal and abstract it sought to be, the more empty it became; so that it was the portrait-painters only, like* Lawrence*, who, having to do with individual expression of subjective qualities, escap'd from the meanness, and represented women whom we can still admire.* Now Keats *was clearly in a predicament from which neither circumstances*

nor disposition provided him an escape. The *social condition of his parents probably excluded him from contact with the best types, and he seems to hav had some idiosyncrasy.* He *deplores in one of his letters that he was not at ease in women's society; and when he attributes this to their not answering to his preconception of them, it looks as if he were seeking his ideal among them.* Certainly *what appears to be the delineation of his conception often offends taste without raising the imagination, and it reveals a plainly impossible foundation for dignified passion, in the representation of which* Keats *fail'd, as we shall see later. I conclude that he suppos'd that common expressions became spiritualiz's'd by being applied to an idea.* Whatever *praise is given to* Keats' *work must always be with this reservation; and he generally does his best where there is no opportunity for this kind of fault.* There *are exceptions, and these are, as one would expect, among the more personally inspir'd poems; for such sonnets as* Time's Sea, I cry your Mercy, Bright Star, *tho' perhaps not quite untainted by this weakness if interpreted by the rest of his work, are yet, if consider'd alone, above reproch.*

This *ideal carries much better his other more homely type of woman, represented to him by his sister-in-law, who was no doubt the model of* Peona, *a lady who has no*

aspirations after the moon; a simple nature which he grew to value even more, of which in the revised Hyperion *he says—*

> *They seek no wonder but the human face,*
> *No music but a happy-noted voice.*

And it must be remember'd that his behaviour towards his own younger sister was a pattern of brotherliness and natural affection, full of sympathy, chivalry, devotion, and common-sense.

III.

THE SHORT *ENDYMION* AND *SLEEP AND POETRY.*

'I stood tiptoe'

THE *first poem in* Keats' *first volume, 'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill', must be consider'd in relation to* Endymion, *for 'Endymion' was its original title, and it may be regarded as a prelude to the longer poem.* It *was written in* December *1816, and was more work'd at*[1] *than one might suppose from what* Keats *tells us of his habits at that time.* The *argument of the poem, tho' much disguised by its objectiv manner, is carfully elaborated.* It *begins with a description of* Nature *as seen in a wavk in the then suburbs of* London—*already romantically remote from us—and from this passes insensibly to other descriptions of* Nature, *with incidental reference to the new school of poetry, which promises to celebrate* Nature (51, *etc.*). Then (*l.* 94 seq.), *in an unfortunat passag, mayden beauty intrudes, and then* (113) *the moon*

Coming into the blue with all her light.

And this moon is the same symbol as in the long poem—

O Maker *of sweet poets! dear delight*
Of this fair world . . .

[1] *Letters, iv.*

Lover of loneliness and wandering,
Of upcast eye.

And then (125) follows a poetic statment of the inspiration of poetry by Nature, which is unique in its bold and fanciful identification of versification with natural forms, e.g. *1. 127—*

In the calm grandeur of a sober line
We see the waving of the mountain-pine, etc.

He then suggests that this ecstasy in Nature may have given origin not only to the music of verse, but to the poetic ideas of such myths as Psyche, Syrinx, and Narcissus, and lastly (181) of Endymion, asserting his preference for that tale, and his wish to write it; and the poem ends (210-242) with a passag of human sympathy, as the direct effect of the marriag of Endymion and Cynthia.

This will giv some notion of Keats' poetic method, but I will take one other poem to illustrate it, the last in the first volume, call'd Sleep and Poetry; *and it is conveniently group'd here, because, like the one just noticed, it is in the same metre as* Endymion, *and both are good examples of Keats' early style.*[1] *They often fall into a*

Sleep and Poetry

[1] *Concerning the versification of* Endymion *there is no reason to repeat objections which were evident from the first to their Serene Cæcities the* Quarterly *and* Blackwood, *but some remarks will be found under* Lamia, *and on p. 152* seq.

feeble manner, and they never rise to his full hight, but here and thare, especially in single lines, they do touch on it, and, quite apart from their inner meaning, hav a beauty worthy of their author, and are very pleasant reading.

Sleep and Poetry *is crowded with meaning. The short analysis of it is thus.* Sleep, *which figures the unawaken'd state of mind,*[1] *is preised for its gentle soothing and inspiring qualities* (*1-18, and* cf. End. *i. 453* seq.) *but subordinated to* Poetry, *which reveals more* (*19-34*). Poetry, *which represents the mind awaken'd to mystery, inspires with ambition and confidence* (*-40*).

Keats *then states his own devotion to* Poetry (*47-55*), *and prays to her for inspiration to penetrate the mysteries of* Nature *and human life* (*-84*). He *davts whether fate will grant him length of life, and gives images of life which bring him back to a picture of the state of mind describ'd in the opening lines of the poem* (*85-95*).

Then *in an important passag* (*101-162*) *he states the spheres of emotion thru' which this poetic love of* Nature *will carry him.* Then (*162-235*) *follow the well-known invectiv against the* Augustan *school, and his prophecy of the coming revival; and at 235 a definition of the true object*

[1] *As pointed out by* Mrs. F. M. Owen *in* Keats: A Study, Kegan Paul, *1880—an important book in the history of the criticism of* Keats' *genius.*

of poetry, to comfort mankind; implying sympathy with human misery. The *rest of the poem, 270 to end, is his peroration to his first publication, an apology for presumption, a determination to write, a tribute to the sympathetic support of his friends, a description of his refuge in* Leigh Hunt's *study, and he ends his book saying of his verses—*

Howsoever they be done,
I leave them as a father does his son.

Compar'd with Wordsworth

This argument seems consecutiv enough, but the passag 101-162 requires explanation. The meaning of it is exactly the same with that of Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey. *In that poem* Wordsworth *distinguishes three states of mind following by development one on another; 1st, boyhood—mere animal pleasure; 2nd, passionat ecstasy in* Nature; *3rd, reflectiv pleasure in* Nature, i.e., *pleasure accompanied by or inwoven with that spiritual insight into the mystery which it is the object of his poem to exhibit.* Now Keats, *in a letter to* Reynolds, *May 1818,*[1] *refers to these lines on* Tintern Abbey, *and sets out his own ideas in the following language:—*

'I compare human life to a large Mansion *of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me.* The *first we step*

[1] *Letters, lii.*

into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and Oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open —but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the balance of good and evil—we are in a mist—we are now in that state—We feel the "burden of the Mystery".

'To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote "Tintern Abbey", and it seems

to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages.'

I do not think that eny one who knows Keats' letters would suppose that he was merely borrowiŋ from Wordsworth, but thare is no objection to supposiŋ that he mȳ hav learnt some of his obstinate questioniŋs from that master, tho' he thavht ovt the answers for himself. The sense in the two poems is, however, identical, and it will repȳ us to examin the extreme difference between Keats' objectiv treatment and Wordsworth's philosophizing. For instance, here is Wordsworth's description of what Keats calls the infant or thav'htless chamber—

> *The coarser pleasures of my boyish days*
> *And their glad animal movements.*

Keats speaks directly of this first state in the openiŋ liŋes of his poem, and incidentally (l. 93), tho' not withovt full contrastiv purpose, he puts it at the end of his images of human life, whare 'knowledge is sorrow, sorrow is wisdom, and wisdom is folly'. These images are of life considered first as a mere atomic movement in a general flux, then as a dream on the brink of destruction, then as a budding hope, then as an intellectual distraction, then as an ecstatic glimpse of beauty, and lastly as an instinctiv animal pleasure.

The whole passag is thus—

Stop and consider! Life is but a day;
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
The reading of an everchanging tale;
The light up-lifting of a maiden's veil;
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm.

Now the last three lines correspond exactly in meaning with the two lines of Wordsworth quoted just above; and the different methods of the two poets are plainly exhibited. The abstract interpretation which I have given of the whole passag quoted from Keats may serve for a further illustration.

Of the Second Chamber Wordsworth's lines will serve the general purpose of this essay, as giving an excellent plain description of Keats' mental condition when he wrote most of his earlier poetry—

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,

The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, etc. (Cp. End. *iii. 142, etc.*)

And when they both describe the Third Chamber here are the parallel passages: Wordsworth *has—*

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

And Keats *has—*

Lo, I see afar,
O'er-sailing the blue cragginess, a car
And steeds with streamy manes—the charioteer
Looks out upon the winds with furious fear:
And now the numerous tramplings quiver lightly
Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly

Wheel downward come they into fresher skies.

. . . . . .

And now I see them on a green-hill's side
In breezy rest among the nodding stalks.
The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks
To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear
Shapes of delight, of mystery. . . .
. . . . . Most awfully intent
The driver of those steeds is forward bent
And seems to listen.

It is impossible to read Wordsworth's statment without seeing his meaning. Keats' poetry is as obscure as the 'dark passages' themselves; but it is a definitly aim'd attempt to express a definitly conceived thavht in poetical terms. If the imagery fails to define the poet's thavht, it must be remember'd that definition is neither desir'd nor savht; and if there does lie behind Keats' poetry a meaning which it is impossible to make absolutely distinct in his objectiv manner, then it is not strange that his poetry should attract meny who hav to confess that they do not entirely understand it.

Poetry of Nature

There must be thavsands and thavsands of persons alive at this moment in England, who, if they coud only giv poetic expression to those mysterious feelings with which

they are moved in the presence of natural beauty, would be one and all of them grater poets than hav ever yet been; but this objectiv presentation of ecstatic moods is only given in rare touches, and seems to be the reward of consummat art. The *old simile, which in the* Iliad *is seldom more than an ornament used to enliven the description in an almost barbaric taste, may be used for a device to secure something of this evasiv wonder.* The *poet having put his reader into the fit mood, then thrusts a natural picture before him, which is seen by him from the human or mysterious point of view; for instance, in* Hyperion, *the exquisit passag—*

Similes.

> *Like a dismal cirque*
> *Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor,*
> *When the chill rain begins at shut of eve*
> *In dull November, and their chancel vault,*
> *The heaven itself, is blinded throughout night,*

is not so much a lightening of the picture of those old monstrous gods, lying out 'at random, carelessly diffused,'—which is its excuse and opportunity,—so much as it is a glorifying of the mystery of Stonehenge[1] *and the forlorn moor, the poetry of which is seized at once by the reader, whose mood has been created for him by the story.*

[1] *It was not actually* Stonehenge *that* Keats *was thinking of, but the smaller* Druid circle *near* Keswick.

Nothing can exceed the force of such a reserved method as this. The intention is artistically conceal'd by the very means which are taken to prepare the effect, and the picture bursts unexpectedly on the reader with all the force of a landscape seen suddenly upon reaching the brow of a hill. But it is of course much more difficult to picture ideas than moods. The purely objectiv picturing of an idea in poetry is very like a musical presentation; and as instrumental music can giv a mood, but cannot be trusted to suggest the simplest idea without the interpretation of words or action either accompanying or preparing it, so the poetic picture requires a statment of its intention; and even then it seems as vage in itself as music, because it would equally well picture some other intentions. Keats givs a statment of the intention of his charioteer in 123-125 and 157, and also by a few words in the picture; yet it must be confess'd that he is not quite successful; and if it may be said that in Wordsworth the statment is overdone, and that what fine poetry thare is, is swamp'd in a self-conscious disquisition, Keats reads like an Apocalypse.

IV.

HYPERION

KEATS *was twenty-two years old when he finish'd* Endymion *in November 1817. It represents his youthful effort towards a reconstruction of English poetry on Elizabethan lines, in sympathy with the romantic and natural schools of his time, and in reaction against the poetry of the last century. A year pass'd before he began* Hyperion, *his other long poem, and in that time he fell under the influence of Milton, recognising in* Paradise Lost *the model of that workmanship, the neglect of which had spoil'd his first attempt.* Hyperion *was to be an epic in Milton's manner, narrating the overthrow of the old elemental Greek gods by the new Olympian hierarchy. The difficulty that the events are supramundane is met by reliance on ancient sculpture for the types of the gods, with some hints from Milton's Pandemonium, and by placing the scene on earth, where his romantic love of Nature could have full play. Hyperion has a palace in the sky, which is luxuriantly described, and he is pictured as resting awhile on the clouds, where he is address'd by Cœlus from space; but he is* Hyperion

quickly brawht dawn to earth, whare alſo the other gods are wandering.

The *opening promises well; we are conscious at once of a new musical blank verse, a music both sweet and strong, alive with imagination and tenderness.* Thare *and thru'owt the poem are passages in which* Keats, *without losing his own individuality, is as good as* Milton, *whare* Milton *is as good as* Virgil;[1] *and such passages rank with the best things that* Keats *ever did; but in other places he seems a little overshadow'd by* Milton, *while definit passages of the* Paradise Lost *are recalled, and in some places the imitation seems frigid.* Milton's *grammar and prosody are apparently eim'd at, but they are not strictly kept, nor is the poem meintein'd at the* Miltonic *elevation.* Here *and thare, too, a fanciful or weak expression betrays the author of* Endymion. When, *in* April *1819,* Keats *had written little more than the first two books, he broke it off; and tho' it was not finally discarded till five months afterwards, he never continued it.* In *his letters he attributes his dissatisfaction to the style; but one cannot read to the end without a conviction that the real hindrance lay deeper; for altho' we may say that this torso of* Keats' *is the only poem since* Milton *which has seriously challenged the epic*

[1] *And see again p. 169.*

place, it is to the style mainly that this is due; the subject lacks the solid basis of outward event, by which epic maintains its interest: like Endymion, *it is all imagination; or, if we should accept* Keats' *personifications as sufficiently real for his purpos, even then the poem fails in conduct.* The *first two books describe the conditions of the older gods, and are impassion'd with defeat, dismay, and collapse; the third introduces the new hierarchy, and we expect to find them radiant, confident, and irresistible; but thare is no change in the colour of the poem; of the two deities introduced,* Apollo *is weeping and raving, and* Mnemosyne, *who has deserted the old dynasty for her hope in the new, 'wails morn and eventide'.* Continuation *in this vein was impossible, at least to an artist like* Keats. Whatever *mental qualities go to make a born artist, none is more essential than an unconscious enthralment to his creativ conception.* When *any true and sane artist has stray'd into a fault that falsifies his conception, then his inspiration comes to a stand.* Coud *he go on, as if all were well, it would be because he was lacking in the essential faculty which makes artistic work good.*

The *failure here is really the same in kind as the fault of* Endymion: *thare is little but imagination, and a one-sidedness or incompleteness of that; a languor which lin-*

gers in the mein design, tho' the influence of Milton *is generally uplifting the language.* That Keats *was conscious that some of his earlier weaknesses were still visible will appear when we come to consider the* Revision of Hyperion*; but it would seem that he never rightly discern'd the cause of his dissatisfaction and collapse, for his own criticism of the poem was that it was* Miltonic *and artificial, and he confesses in a letter of* Sept. 1819[1] *to a revulsion of taste.* Paradise Lost, *which not a month before had been 'every day a greater wonder' to him, is now 'a corruption of our language, accommodating itself to* Greek *and* Latin *inversions and intonations. I have but lately (he writes) stood on my guard against* Milton. *Life to him would be death to me.' These last words mean a great deal, and remind one of* Milton's *ambitious avoidance of* Shakespeare *in his own later work.* But Keats *in condemning grammatical inversion seems going back from the great advance in style which he had made, and it is worth while to inquire what he meant.* It *might seem at first that he attributed to inversions the appearance of* Miltonism *in his poem, and that he coud not afford to be imitativ.* But *he had not abused inversion in* Hyperion, *nor is it absent from his revision, nor wholly from his other poems; and the truth is that it is of the essence of good*

Grammatical inversion

[1] *Letters, cxvi.*

stile. In ordinary speech the words follow a common order prescribed by use, and if that does not suit the sense, correction is made by vocal intonation: but the first thing that a writer must do is to get his words in the order of his ideas, as he wishes them to enter the reader's mind; and when such an arrangment happens not to be the order of common speech, it may be call'd a grammatical inversion. To *take the simplest case, the position of the adjectiv with regard to its substantiv: in* French *it generally follows the substantiv, and this is in most cases its proper place, and for this reason alone descriptions of scenery are generally more pictorial in* French *prose than in* English, *the necessarily frequent predicates being in their natural position: in* English *the common use sets the epithet before the object, and when this is a malposition of ideas, a poet must invert either his grammar or his ideas; and what is true of adjectivs is true also of every word in the sentence.* The *best simple writers hav the art of making the common grammatical forms obey their ideas, and* Keats *has usually a right order of ideas in a simple grammatical form, and a preference for this stile over more elaborat constructions is no davbt what he intended to advocate, and this is well enough: but it must be remember'd that he often gets good effect from the proper use of inversion, which is present*

whare least suspected; and alſo that he does not refuse to invert the grammatical order for the ſake of rhiſme or metre, which, tho' it may occaſionally be a beauty, is generally a liſcence or abuſe, a reſource of bad wriſters, and almoſt as much to be condemn'd as thoſe needleſs or falſe inverſions which are ſometiſmes uſed biſ bad wriſters to giv the effect of hiſhten'd ſtiſle.

Revision of Hyperion

If now, for the convenience of purſuing our ſubject, we conſider the Revision of Hyperion, *we muſt remember that we are paſſing over* Keats' *moſt important work,—for it was between* September *1818, when he began* Hyperion, *and* September *1819, when he diſcarded it, that is, when he was under the* Miltonic *influence, that almoſt all his beſt work was done,—and we ſhall now be dealing with what was really a tranſitional period, tho' its development was arreſted, as under the torture of paſſion, diſappointment and mortal diſeaſe his briſht hopes of poetic atteinment faded from him, and his voice was ſiſlenced for ever.*

He had been diſappointed, too, in a reſolution which he had made to ſupport himſelf and thoſe whom his generoſity inviſted to look to his talents for aſſiſtance, biſ doing ſome hackwork independent of his poetry; and he had returned diſpirited to Hampſtead (October *1819), the home of his unfortunat paſſion, and thare, hiſding from his friends*

his restlessness and gloom, had betaken himself again to composition. By some paradoxical devilry, moreover, he devoted the best hours of the day to supplying the market with a comic poem in the Byronic *vein,* The Cap and Bells, *and work'd in the evenings only, when fatigued and distracted, at the* Revision of Hyperion, *which might be in itself enough to account for any inferiority in the execution.* This *fragment is very interesting; first, it shows a new departure in style,—and* Keats *now deliberatly deserts his old manner of relying chiefly on the objectiv presentation of his ideas by pictures of sensuous imagery and beauty (as described on p. 103, etc.); and, as if he were conscious of his want of success in definition, he now introduces a character who discusses with the main person the meaning of what is pictur'd;—secondly, it shows a deliberat resumption of his old allegorising vein, which we found in* Endymion *and the early poems; and thirdly, it is the most mature attempt that he ever made to express some of his own convictions concerning human life.* It *is in this third aspect that the chief interest lies, and it is strange that its matter should not hav prevented the* Revision *from passing for a first draft, with such critics as might overlook the evidence of the form.* The *style, being evidently less master'd than in the longer poem, might at first sight deceive; but it* Style

should not hav deceived, for, in spite of the inefficient execution, it is in some respects an advance; it aims at a grater severity and has a more thawhtful power than any of Keats' *other work.* But *the evidence of the alterations in the passages common to the two versions is glaring. For instance,*

Invocation *it was an old habit of his to make frequent use of invocation, as almost any page of* Endymion *will show: now in the* Revision of Hyperion *thare is not a single vocativ* O *admitted; and if we examin a passag which contein'd such* O's *in the original, and which is kept in the* Revision, *we shall see how their exclusion accounts for the alterations: for example,* Hyp. *i.* 50:—

> Would come in these like accents; O how frail
> To that large utterance of the early gods!
> Saturn, look up! though wherefore, poor old king?
> I have no comfort for thee, no not one:
> I cannot say, 'O wherefore sleepest thou?'
> For heaven is parted from thee, and the earth
> Knows thee not, thus afflicted, for a god.

The O's *being proscrib'd, the first line is alter'd in* Revision, *328, to*

> Would come in this like accenting: how frail!

and the fifth line to

> Wherefore thus sleepest thou?

And this new thus drives out the original thus from line 7, which now becomes so afflicted. He then sees the two wherefores and alters the third line to and for what, poor lost king; the change of lost for old being made to avoid the hackney'd poor old.

And besides this conscious correction of old faults, it is now for the first time that the influence of Dante appears, and that not merely in the gravity of the vision in this poem, which is unlike any other of his embodiments, and in the sort of connection conceived between his vision of doom and his own experience and poetic meaning, all which he might have come at thru' a translation, but in echos of the Italian balance in passages where the sense is like Dante's, as in this— (Dante)

High prophetess, said I, purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.

And also where there is only the indefinable and individual touch to point to, as in—

When in mid-day the sickening east-wind
Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,

where the last line shows that Keats has now added to his style a mastery of Dante's especial grace: and such passages as this, or again when he calls written words

The shadows of melodious utterance,

which is also Dantesque *in thought, should, I think, have forbidden the later critics, who knew from external evidence when the* Revision *was written, from judging that the new style came from decay of poetic power. In these quotations there is certainly no falling off in the magic of his pen, while faults so foreign to him as the wrongness, lowness and awkwardness in the diction of these lines—*

Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
Such things *as thou* art *are admitted oft*
Into like gardens thou didst pass *erewhile,*

show want of mastery in his new, not failure in his old manner, and are, in my opinion, amply accounted for by the fatigue and distraction of those unhappy evenings.

To conclude this question of style, it may be added, that tho' the effect of an imitation of Milton *is fairly got rid of from the* Revision, *and whole passages are excluded because they were too* Miltonic, *yet inversions and classicisms are used, and in the line—*

Saturn, sleep on; O thoughtless, why did I,

a Latinism *is actually introduced to supplant a mannerism of his own; for* O thoughtless *is changed to* me thoughtless.

Allegory *To pass now to the meaning of the poem, we will begin with what is certain, and so lead up to the more doubtful*

matters. First, *it is certain that the poem was intended as an allegory; it is named* A Vision, *but of* Knowledge *now, not of* Love, *and it begins in a figurative garden, as the* Divina Commedia *in a wood, and there is a supernatural guide, who is to explain things unseen by what is seen.* It *is also clear that the first version of* Hyperion *was to be used to supply the vision, and from this it follows that the old* Hyperion *had also an inner meaning,* Of Hyperion
for it is impossible that Keats *would have forced into an allegory a poem which he had conceived and written without such intention.* But *the original poem being unfinish'd, did not clearly show this; there are, however, indications of it, and one passage, the speech of* Oceanus *in* Bk. *ii, fairly supplies the argument, which is that there is a self-destructive progress in* Nature *towards good, and that beauty, and not force, is the law of this flux or change.* It *seems also probable that* Keats *intended to make* Hyperion *and* Mnemosyne *instruct* Apollo, *and thus to show* Light *and* Song *passing into union and perfection out of elemental chaos and crudeness.* However *this may be,* Oceanus *bids* Saturn *take comfort in his dethronement, 'for,' he says,*

> To *bear all naked truths,*
> And *to envisage circumstance, all calm*
> That *is the top of sovereignty.*

Of Revision

And it is further clear in the Revision that this top of sovereignty is the reward of the poet for conduct in certain circumstances of real life, and that the whole of the introduction (lines 19-266) is an objectiv picture of those circumstances. Here the allegory is complete, and it is here that it should be intelligible.

And this will serve to gide us at once to separate the Revision into two parts, the first down to line 266, which is the new allegory, and the second from line 267 onward, which is an adaptation of the original poem. This latter part we may neglect; it is only a meiming of his earlier fine work; but the first part is original, and tho' it opens badly, and has some poor places, it is, from line 19 onwards, generally worthy to be reckon'd with Keats' best work.

Altho' one cannot be wrong in assuming that this allegory is a description of Keats' own life, and of his latest convictions, and one would think that his letters and poems should supply the key with some certainty, yet I would not venture very far, and would offer what I say as suggestion only.

As I read it, the visionaries are those who neglect conduct for the pursuit of eny ideal. The garden and feast represent the beauties of Nature, and the drink is poetry, which is made from the fruits of the feast. The intoxication

which follow'd the draft represents that complete and excited absorption by poetry which Keats *described himself as suffering when he was writing* Endymion, *and the swoon would be that state of selfish isolation into which he fell in his* Miltonic *period.* His *awaking in the temple is his recovery from this to a sympathy with the miseries of the world; and the temple itself is the temple of* Knowledge, *which it is death for a visionary to enter if he hav not that sympathy.* The *steps to the altar are the struggle of such a mind to reach truth: and truth itself is reveal'd by knowledge.* The *leaves burning on the altar are years of the poet's life, or his youthful faculties.*

Whether *or no any or all of these points are rightly interpreted, it is sure that the general meaning is, that tho'* Keats *conceived of the true poet as a prophet and seer, yet he now valued the life of action and conduct above that of meditation and poetry, and condemns as selfish the merely artistic life which he had been leading; and he is now preaching that actual contact and sympathy with human misery and sorrow are the only school for real insight, which is the reward of true human conduct, and not to be arrived at by any other path.* In *this way only can the poet hope to create anything of value and become himself immortal.*

Moneta, *the new name for* Mnemosyne, *must be con-*

nected with moneo, *and* Memory *is the same as* Knowledge, *and she can* admonish *or teach a knowledge of 'the mysteries of earth'. And this knowledge is what is requir'd to make a poet of a visionary. She is thus foster-mother of* Apollo *as well as mother of the* Muses. *She has a harp; and when* Apollo *says, 'For me dark, dark, and painful vile* oblivion *seals my eyes', this oblivion must be ignorance regarded as the opposit of that knowledge which is memory. Compare* Hyperion, *iii, where* Apollo *'becomes immortal' by reading in* Mnemosyne's *lyes, just as the poet is to do in the* Revision. *Thus the temple must be the temple of* Knowledge=Memory;[1] *and it is fit that* Mnemosyne, *the* Memory *of all things, should be primeval, and sister to the oldest god.*

The conception of her temple, all that is spar'd from the thunder of the war, is extremely fine in its allegorical manner, with its doors barr'd to the sunrise, and the western past clos'd by a mighty mythical imag of a dead god, and an altar, beside which the goddess of the memory of all change stands veil'd in the smoke of the sacrifice of the poet's life. The *marble palace in* End. *ii. 256-270, corresponds somewhat closely with this temple, tho' the mean-*

[1] Cf. *Letter xxxvii, 'Memory should not be called* Knowledge.' *February 1818.*

They saw me not,
But in blank splendour beam'd, like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast.

V.

THE TALES

THERE *are three finish'd tales or short narrativ poems* Isabella
bi Keats, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, *and* Lamia.
They are all famous for their beauty, and the first two, which are in stanza, may be said to hav become almost popular. Isabella *has, in fact, caus'd the story of the pot of basil to be widly known in* England, *as much perhaps from the pictures of artists who took their subject from* Keats *as from the poem itself.* The *story is unpleasant, and is the worst executed of the three; but the poet has overcome the gruesomeness with skill—he parenthetically interrupts his narration to confess the difficulty,—yet he seldom stays for meny lines together above his weaker vein: the appearance of* Lorenzo's *ghost to* Isabella, *from stanza xxxi onwards, being the best sustein'd passag.* The *poem has meny examples of* Keats' *originality of imagination and felicity of phrase, but is teinted thru'out bi a characteristic ægritude of passion, which makes the best occasion*

which Porphyro sets out in Madeline's chamber is robb'd of its motive and serves no purpose but to enrich the description. Both these strands should have been woven in; but they are selected in keeping with the story, and make some of the most successful colouring. The Eve of St. Agnes is not only a passionate tale, but it is very rich in the kind of beauty characteristic of Keats, and contains high poetry both of diction and feeling: the majority of poetic readers would not wish it different from what it is.

Lamia, *which was written between July and September 1819, that is, in the interval between the discontinuing and the rejection of* Hyperion, *is in rhym'd couplets. These differ from those of* Endymion *in showing an approch to Dryden's versification,*[1] *and in so far a return from the extreme reaction against Pope with which Keats began. There will always be difference of opinion as to what the excellence of this metre is, but the source of the uncertainty in which Keats found himself is easy to explain. The metre in Chaucer's hands came to be perfectly successful, and chiefly because it was light; and the lightness was due to the presence in his language of terminal vowels and inflexions* Lamia

[1] *So the critics say; and Charles Brown told Lord Houghton that Keats purposly studied Dryden's verse: I have not myself a sufficiently intimate acquaintance with it to enable me to judg.*

which hav since become mute or entirely disappear'd. For *instance,* Chaucer *wrote—*

As thick as motës in the sonnë beam.

Milton's *ten syllables are*

As the gay motes that people the sunbeams.

All the buoyancy is gon; and this exemplifies the change which necessarily came over the rhym'd heroic verse. It became heavier and less adapted for narration, and at last was cast mechanically in polish'd couplets, which pass'd in a dull generation for a triumph of classic grace, and were prescrib'd by the Universities as the only form in which they would recognise English poetry. Later poets hav used different devices for lightening the metre, so as to make it again do Chaucer's work, but the general result is that their lightly constructed verse is slovenly. Endymion *was very successful in the quality of lightness, but it met with no favour, and the lightness was gain'd at the cost of other qualities which* Keats *coud now regard without prejudice. In* Endymion *the couplet and line units are reduced to a minimum of value, and with these the rhyme value sinks, so that the unrhym'd lines in the poem are scarcely noticed: on the other hand, the verses are frequently tagg'd by evidently foisted rhymes. But in reading the first dozen lines of* Lamia, *the problem seems solved; all is*

both light and sure, and there are neither tags nor self-conscious couplets: nothing could be better, and a great deal of the poem is as good as this. The device of separating the couplets by a pause in the sense after the first rhyme is retain'd from Endymion, *and rhyme-triplets and twelve-syllable lines are introduced. But the poem is not all equally well written, the whole passage, i. 300-350, where the subject does not suit him, is plainly below the mark, and here the tags reappear, and they are much more self-evident and offensive in this kind of verse than in* Endymion, *where they were an avow'd means of construction, and where their frequency became familiar and had the advantage of giving great force to any unbroken couplets that were introduced. As for the triplets and twelve-syllable lines, these are no doubt used sometimes with skill, but among regular 'heroics' they are a device of the most transparent artificiality, and by their carfully irregular intrusion they openly expose the monotony which they would awkwardly obviate. From which it would seem that they would find a better home in the less regular verse.*

The problem how to match Chaucer's narrative in modern English is much more nearly solv'd in the unfinish'd Tale The Eve of St. Mark, *written in eight-syllable couplets with the same sort of latitude which Coleridge advocated* Eve of St. Mark

in Christabel. *The fragment is too short to be a complete experiment, but, so far as it goes, the light verse carries the description of the cathedral town on a shavery Sunday evening in spring with an easy geniality combining beauty and homeliness, and suits just as well the indoors picture, with its combination of mystery and real life; and his mastery of all this, independently of his playful affectation of the delicacies of middle English (copied apparently from Chatterton) recall Chaucer's charm, and seem to show that he had here hit on a narrativ form which he might hav successfully perfected.*

As *for the poetry of* Lamia,[1] *it does not all go on as well as it begins, and sometimes fails too in its most highly-wrawht passages. The description of the serpent is overdone to vagness, and her transformation has the same fault.* Words *like* rosy *and* phosphor *assert themselves; others are dress'd at the call of the rhime; while very common expressions occasionally produce a bathos, i. 201, 330, 335; ii. 12, 15, 89, 128. Yet* Keats *was trying to correct his old faults; for instance, in revising, he appears to hav written* silently *in ii. 134 for* silverly: *and* Lamia *is constructivly the most perfect of his three narrativs. I remark that 'the taller grasses and full flowering weed' of i. 44 do not*

[1] *For a criticism of the passion, see p. 162.*

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agree with the daffodils of line 184: and I consider it a blot that Lycius *should die at the end; because he is kill'd by* Apollonius, *who, if he coud not rescue him, should hav let him alone.* Philosophy *or* Reason *is made unamiable: but I am afreid that* Keats *may hav intended this; and he makes* Apollonius *laugh, which is almost diabolic.* The *general meaning is, no doubt, the antagonism of reason and pleasure, or of science and imagination* (*ii. 229* seq.), *or both; and that reason should take delight in destroying pleasure is only one of the ugly doctrins that lurk beneath the text if it be redd as a parable.* But *it is very uncertein hav much* Keats *intended.* He *may hav had in his mind the selfishness of the artist absorb'd in his ideals, and his catastrophe in the justifiable indifference of the world to the creations of mere art.* On *August 23, 1819, he wrote thus: 'A solitary life engenders pride and egotism, but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than anything else could,—so I will indulge it.'* And *in less than a month he had wholly banish'd from himself as unworthy this strong conviction of his duty.*

VI.

THE ODES

HAD Keats *left us only his* Odes, *his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is, for they hav stood apart in literature, at least the six most famous of them; and these were all written in his best period, when he was under the* Miltonic *influence—that is, between the early spring of 1819, while he was still engag'd on* Hyperion, *and the autumn, when he discarded it.* These *are the six:* 1. Psyche; 2. Melancholy; 3. Nightingale; 4. Greek Urn; 5. Indolence; 6. Autumn.

To *these should be added 7, the fragment of the* May Ode, *May 1, 1818, and 8, the* Ode to Pan, *from* Endymion, *bk. i, and 9, the* Bacchic Ode to Sorrow *in* Endymion, *bk. iv.* But *the two hymns to* Neptune *and* Diana *in* Endymion *are only worth enumeration, and the two early odes to* Apollo *and the* Ode to a Lock of Milton's Hair *are, as are the two later* Odes to Fanny, *chiefly or entirely of personal interest.*

Of *the seven odes first enumerated, if we rank them merely according to perfection of workmanship, the one that*

was last written, that is, the Ode to Autumn, *will claim the highest place; and unless it be objected as a slight blemish that the words 'Think not of them' in the 2nd line of the 3rd stanza are somewhat awkwardly address'd to a personification of* Autumn, *I do not know that any sort of fault can be found in it.* But *this ode does not in any part of it reach the marvellous heights attain'd by several of the others in their best places, and even if judg'd as a whole it is left far behind by the splendour of the* Nightingale, *in which the mood is more intense, and the poetry vies in richness and variety with its subject.*

The *song of the nightingale is, to the hearer, full of assertion, promis, and cheerful expectancy, and of pleading and tender passionat overflowing in long drawn-out notes, interspersed with plenty of playfulness and conscious exhibitions of musical skill.* Whatever *pain or sorrow may be express'd by it, it is idealis'd—that is, it is not the sorrow of a sufferer, but the perfect expression of sorrow by an artist, who must hav felt, but is not feeling; and the ecstasy of the nightingale is stronger than its sorrow, altho' different hearers may be differently affected according to their mood.* Keats *in a sad mood seized on the happy interpretation and promis of it, and gives it in this line—*

Singest of summer *in full-throated ease.*

But the intense feeling in his description of human sorrow (stanza 3) is weaken'd by the direct platitude that the bird has never known it; and in the penultimat stanza the thawht is fanciful or superficial,—man being as immortal as the bird in every sense but that of samness, which is assumed and does not satisfy. The introduction, too, of the last stanza is artificial, while his choosing self *for a rhyme-word,*[1] *turns awt disastrously; and he loses hold of his mein idea in the words 'plaintive anthem', which, in expressing the dying awy of the sawnd, changes its character.* No *preise, however, cowd be too high for those last six lines; and if grammar and sense are a little obscure in the first ten, I cowd not name eny* English *poem of the same length which contains so much beauty as this ode.*

Next *to this I should rank* Melancholy. *The perception in this ode is profawnd, and no dawbt experienced. The paradox that melancholy is most deeply felt by the organisation most capable of joy is clinch'd at the end by the observation of the reaction which satiety provokes in such temperaments, so that it is awlso in the moment of extremest joy that it suddenly fades—*

[1] *The elf belongs to* W. Brown *of Tavistock, whom I suspect to hav been the remote cawse of the hitch in the first stanza—*

Philomel, I do not envy thy sweet carolling.

Brit. Past., *i. 3, 164.*

Turning to poison while the bee mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine.

In spite of the grat beauty of this ode, especially of the last stanza, it does not hit so hard as one would expect. I do not know whether this is due to a false note[1] *towards the end of the second stanza, or to a disagreement between the second and third stanzas. In the second stanza the melancholy is, as Lord Houghton said, a 'luxurious tenderness', while in the third it is strong, peinful, and incurable.*

The line—

That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,

means all the flawers only that are sacred to sorrow. See End. *iv. 170.*

Next in order might come Psyche, *for the sake of the last section (l. 50 to end), tho' this is open to the objection that the imagery is work'd up to awtface the idea—which is characteristic of Keats' manner. Yet the extreme beauty quenches every dissatisfaction. The beginning of this ode is not so good, and the middle part is midway in excellence.*

Next, and disputing place with the last, comes the Grecian Urn. *The thawht as enawnced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its*

[1] *For its explanation, see p. 163.*

unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressiv, monotonous, and scatter'd, the attention being cavil'd to fresh details without result (see espec. ll. 21–24, anticipated in 15, 16), which gives an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumbling on a pun, but its concluding lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.

The last of the six, Indolence, *is the objectiv picturing of a transient mood, and may be the description of an actual half-waking vision. If the details, such as the appearing of the figures four times, hav no definit meaning, and I cannot fix eny, they are too arbitrary. Parts of stanzas 2 and 3 and all the 5th are of the best work; but the whole ode scarcely earns its title; and its mein interest, that is, its fervour and feeling, betrays the poet into an undignify'd utterance in line 4 of the last verse.*

The fragment of the May Ode *is immortal on account of the famous passag of inimitable beauty descriptiv of the Greek poets—*

Leaving great verse unto a little clan, etc.

With these seven the two chief odes in Endymion *are worthy to rank. The ode to Pan in Book I is good enough in design. Pan is first invok'd as ruler in dark and moist woods;*

secondly, as the god to whom all natural products are sacred with contrast of sunny places; thirdly, as king of fauns and satyrs; fourthly, for six lines as farm-god. But *this last idea has been anticipated by interpolation in the previous section.* Then *the last part of the ode connects* Pan *with the secrets and power of* Nature. The *expression* But no more, *however interpreted, is unfortunat at the end of the ode.* The *diction thru'out is rich and the imagery chosen well for the work that it has to do in the various aspects of the god's energy, the different objects being seized and shown in happy phrases full of knowledg and feeling; and tho' it might perhaps hav been better if the second section had immediatly preceded the last, rather than that the mysteries should follow close on the farm, there is no grat fault to find.* But *yet the ode does not at first reading make an impression corresponding to these merits, nor has it won, like the others, a high reputation; and this may be due partly to the vagness of the personification, caused by the variety of attributes and objects, and partly to the versification, which, tho' generally easy and fluent, pauses, especially in the second division, too frequently in the mid-line, in the manner of tagging, and produces thare something of the effect of a catalog, very foreign to the repose and finish which we look for in a set ode.*

Lastly, as to the Ode to Sorrow *in the 4th book of* Endymion, *I regard this as one of the gratest of* Keats' *achievements, and agree with all that* Mr. Sidney Colvin *has said in its preise in his* Life of Keats. *It unfortunatly halts in the opening, and the 1st and 4th stanzas especially are unequal to the rest, as is again the 3rd from the end,* 'Young stranger', *which for its matter would with more propriety hav been cast into the previous section; and these impoverish the effect, and contein expressions which might put some readers off. If they would begin at the 5th stanza and omit the 3rd from the end, they would find little that is not admirable.* And, *as it stands, the ode is, I think, the better for these omissions.* The *pictorial description of the* Bacchic *procession is unmatch'd for life, wide motion, and romantic dreamy* Orientalism, *while the concluding stanzas, returning to the first movement, are as lovely as eny* Elizabethan *lyric, and in the same manner.* The *bold contrast and passion of the ode, in spite of its weaker opening and the few expressions which remind one that it is an early work, giv it a unique place among the richest creations of the* English Muse.

VII.

SONNETS

THERE *are nearly sixty sonnets in the latest editions of* KEATS' *poems, but the most of them are sonnets only in external form.* THE *metrical laws and liberties of sonnet-writing hav been much inflicted on readers, and sonnets are usually classifi'd by their differences in these minor particulars.* BUT *a more useful classification would be by their contents and form of thavht.* THE *typical sonnet is a reflective poem on love, or at least in some mood of love or desire, or absorbing passion or emotion; and such a definition includes almost everything which cannot be readily referr'd to some quite different species of poetry, as a few considerations may illustrate.*

THE GREEK *epigram, for instance, was originally, as the name implies, an inscription: its business was to record some event or mark some place, and its excellence to raise an emotion in the reader's mind.* ITS *qualities, terseness with pathos, soon establish'd a form which poets used for other purposes, until in the hands of city wits the name wholly changed its signification, and often nav the record is a piece*

of scandal, and the emotion such as may be expressed by a well-bred jeer; a sad fall from Simonides. The sonnet form has been as loosely and variously used as the epigram, and the many varieties of the two have more than one point of contact; but it is plain that an epigram proper cannot become a sonnet by mere expansion to fourteen lines;—this happens to exceed epigrammatic length, but is possible in dedications and temple inscriptions,—and such a hybrid may at least be separated off as an epigrammatic sonnet.

Again, Horace elaborated a form of ode which it is easier to recognise than in few words describe; and a number of Milton's sonnets may be referred to this ode form. If we compare, for example, his Cyriack, whose grandsire, *with* Martiis cœlebs *or* Æli vetusto, *there can be no doubt that Milton was here deliberately using the sonnet form to do the work of Horace's tight stanzas; and not the whole of Shakespeare's or Petrarch's sonnets set alongside will show enough kinship with these sonnets of Milton to draw them away from their affinity with Horace. Such sonnets, too, as his addresses to Vane, Fairfax, and Cromwell are properly odes, and should be called odes, or at least odic sonnets.*

Again, there is a class of poetry called 'occasional verse', and such a poem as may be written on any trivial event or fancy cannot become a sonnet because it goes begging for a

dress, and conscious not only of nakedness but of leanness, steals a well-cut garment for disguise.

These examples may suffice, if it be noted first, that nothing forbids a true sonnet from having an epigrammatic, or odic, or occasional motive—and this last is very common; and secondly, that all these forms and others are found mix'd in the sonnet with its true subject-matter in all proportions.

Now not so many as half of Keats' sonnets can by any stretch of interpretation be call'd sonnets proper, if we consider their substance rather than their verse form. The greater number of them are occasional, reflective, or odic addresses or dedications, or poems on places and books. And these hybrids come thickest among the earlier poems, while the true sonnets predominate towards the end. Again, almost all the early sonnets are Italian in rhyme system, and all the later are Shakespearian; and if we pick out from them the twelve best poems, these will all be found to be true sonnets and eight of them on the Shakespearian model. Twelve is all that very high praise can be given to, and that number already encroches on the second best; and if a next twelve be chosen, this would be made up almost equally of true sonnets and hybrids. From which it seems that these hybrid poems of Keats, tho most of them

contein lines which make us glad to possess and preserve them, are among his immature performances; and also that as he improved in composition he relinquish'd his forein subject-matter, and the Italian *rhyme system, and did his best work in the* English *manner.*

There are ten very fine sonnets; they are—

*'*Much *have I travelled.'*
*'*When *I have fears.'*
*'*Come *hither all sweet maidens.'*
*'*Four *seasons.'*
*'*Bright *star.'*
*'*O *soft embalmer.'*
'I cry your mercy.'
*'*As Hermes *once.'*
*'*The *day is gone.'*
*'*Time's *sea.'*

And with these, some might class for its easy and pleasant mastery—

*'*To *one who hath been long in city pent.'*

*And the sonnet '*Why *did I laugh to-night?' has been selected and admir'd by some critics: it seems to me to be turgid and capricious, and hence unsuccessful.* But *all the first ten are extremely fine—the first eiht being nearly faultless—and must stand among the best in the languag.*

And if we pass from them to the next in merit, thare is a grat fa∧ll. Such a list would contein Spenser a jealous honourer; Many the wonders; Nymph of the downward smile; How many bards; Small busy flames; Keen fitful gusts; My spirit is too weak; Glory and loveliness, *and* The town the churchyard; *and thare is not one of these which does not plainly fail, and that sometimes badly, in some part, tho' a∧ll hav their points of excellence.*[1]

Not to speak of the magnificence of the ten best sonnets (the 8th line of the first is below the mark; the final couplet of No. 2 *is weak; the 4th line of* No. 9 *requires much allowance, and see p. 92),* Keats' *sonnets are generally distinguish'd by a total absence of the self-consciousness which is the common bane of sonnets, and has got them a bad name among honest folk; so that many lovers of poetry put* Keats' *sonnets next to Shakespeare's. They are free from effort and puzzle-headedness and pedantry, and when they do fa∧ll, they do not fa∧ll stiffly but negligently, and most of them are pleasant poems and gratful to the reader.*

[1] *Matthew* Arnold *selected eiht sonnets; five are among the eiht which I hav set first: the other three are*—After dark vapours; Great spirits now; The poetry of the earth.

VIII.

EPISTLES

THERE *are four* Epistles *written in ten-syllable couplets:—*

1. *To* Geo. Felton Mathew (*Nov. 1815*).
2. *To my brother* George (*Aug. 1816*).
3. *To* Ch. Cowden Clarke (*Sept. 1816*).
4. *To* Reynolds (*March 1818*).

And with them may be group'd the two poems criticised p. 94, etc., that is, the short Endymion *and* Sleep and Poetry.

Tho' thare are good things in these Epistles, *their execution is in every respect very poor, and they are in so far more like letters written in rhime than poems in the form of letters, and they may all be taken with the apology which* Keats *sent with the fourth, to 'excuse the unconnected subject and careless verse'. The* Epistle *to* Cowden Clarke *is altogether far the worst, and tho' it has a rational argument, it is not worth defending from eny condemnation for want of artistic form; but it is in my opinion wrong to include the other early epistles and poems in this*

judgment. In my previous analysis of two of these, I have pointed out their really solid construction, and the 1st, 2nd and 4th of the Epistles *are, I should say, quite as well built. Their 'argument' is perfectly clear, and if the form of it escapes the reader's attention, that is due to the lightness of the imaginative touch and flight, which is a welcome escape from the conscious pedantries of form, and, so long as the sense is clear, a great merit. Indeed, if the expression of these* Epistles *were at all worthy of their frame-work, they would be models of what such epistles should be.* Nos. *1 and 2 must be pass'd over here.* No. *4 is of great interest. Its argument (tho' Keats himself calls the poem unconnected) is a very beautiful artistic movement of thought, just short of caprice, returning at the end with great force to the apparent first motive, which is suddenly reveal'd as being much weightier than was at first allow'd to appear. The heads are these:—Automatic capricious imaginations of all kinds, 1-12, very common; they may be beautiful, as a picture by* Titian, *described, -25; or like* Claude's Enchanted Castle, *described, -66. The wish that all our imaginings could take such colouring, etc., question why they cannot, -85. The poet shows himself haunted by a horrid mood,*[1] *-end.*

[1] *And see again p. 166.*

The passage l. 67 onwards is of importance with respect to Keats' *method—*

O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,
Would all their colours from the sunset take:
From something of material sublime, *etc.*

If this be compar'd with the passage which is contrasted with Wordsworth *on p. 102 there will be a mutual illustration of sense.*

Keats also here, in a confession of failure, analyses his inability to express his ideas—

Imagination brought
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
Cannot refer to any standard law
Of either earth or heaven.

Also in this poem he plainly states that he does not consider his mind matured, nor able to teach, and that he is a prey to the moods of pessimism, but that he will not give way to them. He *longs rather for the time when he shall arrive at 'the love of good and ill', and speaks of it as his 'award'.*

IX.

LYRICAL POEMS

If *we include among the lyrical poems those written in seven-syllable couplets, we find three popular pieces,* Souls of Poets, Bards of Passion, *and* Ever let the Fancy Roam. *In a letter to his brother, January 1819,* Keats *writes:* '*These are specimens of a sort of rondeau which I think I shall become partial to, because you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet.*' *The theme is stated in the first four lines, and then, after an amplification without progress, these are used again in the last division to make a close by return, like a rondo in music; and the form seems good, simple and attractiv. These three poems hav all of them the popular qualities of fluency and grace, and the statment of the subject is provocativ of interest; yet, tho' the first sustains itself in a fine vein for six lines, thare is little other merit either of thavht or diction in the first two.* Mr. M. Arnold *chose these and excluded the* Fancy *from his selection, but thare can be no davbt that this last is by far the best of the three. It is maintain'd thru' avt at a fair*

Seven-syllable couplets

level, and the simple descriptions of nature, recalling L'Allegro, *are often very beautiful; and in the last division there is a sensuous passage done in the fine* Miltonic *manner, where the eight-syllable line is introduced with great effect, descriptively of* Jove's *languor.*

Of the five other poems in this measure there is none worthy of praise as a whole.

Lyrics in stanzas

There are left now only the lyrical poems in stanza, and easily first, holding a unique place in literature, stands La belle dame sans merci. *This occurs in a long journalistic letter from* Keats *to his brother in* America, *and is dated* 'Wednesday evening', *that is,* April 28, 1819. *It seems as if he had compos'd it on that day, and written it down hastily from memory, so that he had to correct several mistaks afterwards; and, from the remarks appended to it, it looks as if he was at the time unaware of its great merit.* It *was not inserted in the* Lamia *volume, but first appear'd thru'* Leigh Hunt *in the* Indicator *for* May 10, 1820, *and this version differs from that in* Keats' *letter in one or two points; and these may be corrections by* Keats, *but the original first line, which exists in* Keats' *own handwriting, must be kept.* 'Wretched wight', *the unfortunat correction, is of the same kind, and appears to be of the same date as the corrections of* Hyperion: *it is cold*

and poor, and damagiŋ to the tragic motiv of the poem, and owt of keepiŋ with its heroic detɛil, wharas the original 'knight-at-arms' *givs the keynote of romance and of aloofness from real liʃe, and the suggestion of armour is of the gratest value to the general colouriŋ. It would be impertinence to preise this poem, which charms aliʃke old and ouŋ: and it stands above the reach of criticism.* For *other reasons it is better not to criticiʃse* 'In a drear-nighted December', *which, after a very loŋ interval indeed, must be placed next. This poem, which must surely hav been* Thos. Hood's *model, is a grat favourit, and perhaps deservedly so, both for its beauty and originality, but the latter quality proves expensiv.*[1] *And after this poem thare is another gap, for if we mention the next best lyrics, we come to such poems as* Meg Merrilies, *and* Where be you going, you Devon maid? *which, as* Lord Houghton *printed it, omitting the second stanza, is successful; and* I had a dove, *which coud only hav been written biʃ a poet; and* Walking in Scotland, *of which the obscurity and strangness of the sentiment descriʃb'd make it noteworthy.* Mrs. Owen *quotes the* Faery soŋ Shed no tear! *as worthy of* Keats, *but we wonder how it was that thare are not more better lyrics.* Keats, *one would*

[1] *Several amended versions of the last stanza hav latly come to liʃht, 1929.*

hav thavht, would hav excell'd in them, and we can only suppose that we hav his odes instead.

Success in lyrical verse requires a delicatly strict subjection of imagination to one purpos, and this was not a part of Keats' *poetic instinct; and tho' when he came to learn it, he wrote as it would seem almost unconsciously one of the best lyrics in the world; yet it is not improbable that he would still hav regarded lyrics as a tract whare he might cast off restreint.* The *fact remeins that, with the exception of* La belle dame, *he never bravht all his genius to 'spend its fury in a song'.*

X.

OTHO AND *STEPHEN*

OTHO the Great *is contemporary with* Lamia: *it* Otho
was written July–September *1819, and should therfore be amon*ᵹ Keats' *best work; but it is not, so that its fcilure must be specially accounted for: and it m*ᵹ*, I think, be entirely leid to inexperience, and to the ugly and ill-shapen* Elizabethan *models to which* Keats *apparently look'd in good feith for gidance; and amon*ᵹ *which, with their stagey fury, unnecessary confusions, rude manners, and occasional magnificences, his plᵹ might pass undistinguish'd.* Unfortunatly *too this plᵹ turns on a question of meiden virtue, which he coud not handle, and which he did not even choose for himself, for the plot was furnish'd him bi a friend, who gave him the scenes across the table to versifi or dramatise one bi one—a most deadenin*ᵹ *situation.* It *is badly contriv'd: the antecedent conditions are very elaborat, and yet are never pleinly stated; they hav to be discover'd from isolated, ill-manag'd and confused hints in the dialog; so that the attention of an avditor, if it was not entirely put off bi this riddle, would only be kept alive*

by a wish to come to a judgment of his gesses. The *riddle, moreover, has no satisfactory solution.* Then *the scenes themselves are rather lacking in distinct dramatic point, independently of the uncertainty of the motiv.* But *if these faults are not wholly due to* Keats, *he must yet hav the blame of the lack of moral import, and of the imperfect delineation of the characters, whose manners are not good, and who seem to take a conscious interest in the plot.* The *style has the faults of cold magnificence, occasional flatness and common expressions, with carless grammar, and the use of childish tricks for impromptu effect.* In *spite of all this, thare is a succinctness and force about the whole, which forbid one to conclude that* Keats *would not hav succeeded in drama: and tho' it is commonly said that he lack'd the essential moral grasp, his letters seem to me to refute this, and his determination would hav been sufficient assurance of success.* In *fact, the fragment of* Stephen, *which he began on his own lines after finishing* Otho, *already shows an advance.* This *is written in a style midway between* Marlowe *and* Shakespeare, *and recalls the opening of the third part of* Henry VI. The *imitated magnificence is somewhat restless, but the narrativ and purpos of the characters stand out fairly well amid the stir and freedom which was evidently the poet's aim.*

Stephen

It would be easy to quote from Otho *some fine passages, and meny fine lines and expressions, but they seem to be buried in a rubbish-heap from which one gladly turns back to the green tangle of* Endymion.

XI.

DICTION AND RHYTHM

Vocabulary

KEATS' *vocabulary, to judge by the impression that one gets from reading his poems, is rich, and his use of quite a large number of words that are not commonly found must be reckon'd among the factors of his style.* MR. W. ARNOLD[1] *has made a special examination of these, and his remarks imply an objection to adjectives with the suffix* Y, *like* bloomy and bowery; *but when these are form'd from substantives they are regular enough.* Adjectives *thus form'd from other adjectives—like* paly, *which should mean full of pales or palings,—are not on the same footing: to any one accustom'd to* Chaucer's *verse they would sound more like old than new words, and they would be useful in versification, but they are also like baby-talk, and generally indefensible; it does not appear, however, that* Keats *laid himself open to any reproch in this particular.* Paly *had been used by other writers; and even with these words the test is their success, not their regularity. I never heard of anyone objecting to* Shakespeare's

I can call spirits from the vasty *deep.*

Indeed, what is in question is very much the same with the

[1] *Essay publish'd with his edition of* Keats' *poems.*

words as with the spirits, whether they will come when you do call for them.

Among Keats' *inventions* spangly *does not look promising; but the passage in* Isabella—

> As *when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,*
> Thinking *on rugged hours and fruitless toil,*
> We *put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,*
> And *see the* spangly *gloom froth up and boil,*

amply justifies the word, for which no other could be substituted: and it has been received into the language. So *again the* 'pipy *hemlock' in the* Ode to Pan *is admirable: on the other hand,* 'boundly reverence' *defies interpretation; but the general result of* Mr. Arnold's *examination is that most of the strange words in* Keats *were taken from earlier writers.* Readers *of the poems cannot miss noting these: they are less likely to observe the exact nature of the class of epithets which most frequently recur; the chief group might, I think, be call'd languid, such as* quiet, sweet, fair, white, green, old, young, little, *and other such words as* tender, gentle, easy, fresh, pleasant, *most of these suggestive of comfort.* Then *the* melting, fainting, swimming, swooning, *and* panting *words are overfrequent.* Words *like* wild, dark, deep, strange, lone, mysterious, *etc., have a great deal to do, but they are not*

work'd so hard as by Shelley. Keats *has also a pretty steady recurrence of certain objects; he is as fond of* moss *and* eagles *as* Shelley *was, and* echoes, bees, marble, silver, dew, nests *and* weeds,—*and the list might be extended,—are too conspicuous. A great deal of the general insipidity and tedium of* Endymion *may be analysed down to this. The over-frequent use which he makes of* tiptoe—*taken from* Shakespeare—*is very characteristic of his manner. But he outgrew all this, and if in his early poems he uses these words too frequently, yet he has also used them as well as they can be used. Some faults of his pronunciation, which have been call'd* Cockneyisms, *cannot be pass'd so easily. Thus* perhaps, *used as a monosyllable, is abominable: but this occurs only in the early poems. And he renounces in* Lamia *his pronunciation of* toward, *which he had hitherto used as a disyllable accented on the last, and comes round to the contracted pronunciation. This word, and words like* fire *and* lyre, *which he makes disyllables, often weaken his lines; for in disyllabic metres which admit elisions and trisyllabic feet, they will not readily, at least to my ear, sustain a whole foot of two syllables. Verse which allows such a line as this—*

Pronunciation

Ah desperate mortal! I even dared to press (End. *i.* 661), *halts at the following—*

And then, towards me, like a very maid (i. 634).

Dearest Endymion, my entire love (iii. 1022).

The lyre of his soul Æolian tuned (ii. 866).

But Keats also amended this later, tho' too late to destroy the effect of his example, and used these syllables[1] *in* Hyperion *as Milton would hav done—*

Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side (iii. 63).

Of the same kind is the exaggerated value which he gives to the semivowel l, *in the following lines for example—*

The dazz-l-ing sunrise; two sisters sweet,

Turn'd syllab-l-ing thus: Ah, Lycius *bright.*

He also, like Shelley, makes a trisyllable of evening.

There is another peculiarity common to Keats and Shelley, which should be noticed because it introduces an instability into Keats' rhythms. It is found in earlier writers, for instance, in this line from Shakespeare—

Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer,

where the accent of the last foot is not inverted, but the compound torch-bearer, *which we pronounce with a stress both on the first and second syllables, carries no stress at all on the second, but perhaps a slight compensating stress*

[1] *Lyre is an unfortunat word to extend unduly. I hav seen the following verse as motto for a song-book—*

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere.

or dely on the last. Thare are a grat meny words made in this wy of a monosyllable and a disyllable, in which we nav observe both the colliding accents; and if these words occur in disyllabic rhythms of alternat stress, with their first syllable in the regular stress'd place, then the next foot will to our ears, trein'd as they hav been by Milton, hav its stress inverted. I think that this is not always intended by Keats: here are examples—

A show-monster about the streets of Prague.
That camp-mushroom, dishonour of our house.
Of bean-blossoms in heaven freshly shed.
Or they might watch the quoit-pitchers, intent.
Of love-spangles just off yon cape of trees.
The poor folk of the sea-country I blest.
Then came a conquering earth-thunder and rumbled.
All death-shadows, and glooms that overcast.
Make not your rosary of yew-berries.

And the pronunciation in the following lines is probably caused by the same dislike of colliding accents in a compounded trisyllable—

Look'd up; a conflicting of shame and ruth.
And strives in vain to unsettle and wield.

And thus no dawbt—

In a drear-nighted December.

We nav read this lı̣ne (as we do most of the others) with avr changed accent, and we rather lı̣ke the irregularity thus introduced into the verse. Thare is, in fact, one lı̣ne of Shelley which is particularly admı̣r'd for a very beautiful rhythm, which he probably did not intend—

And wild-roses and ivy serpentine,

whare Shelley, I should suppose, stress'd wild-roses lı̣ke primroses: in the same poem is

There grew pied windflowers and violets.

And he has

Swéet-basìl and mignonétte.

Bríde-maidèns, quick-silvèr, bírd-footèd, traín-bearèr, etc., and in the Recollection are píne-forèst, and wóod-peckèr, whare the beautiful versification has, at least to mı̣ ear, a charm added to it bı̣ the extra lı̣cence which avr pronunciation introduces.

Whether these poets took this accent from the Eliza-bethans, or whether it really had linger'd on, I do not know: in later poets it seems only an affectation; but it is a real sorce of uncertainty in Keats' verse, because he not only used the other pronunciation alſo, but he allaw'd the rhythmical inversions which that would introduce into the verses whare it was apparently not intended.

And for this reason it would not do to decı̣de this ques- Rhythm

tion merely on the assumption that Keats *coud not hav intended the inversion of stress.* He *begins one sonnet with the line—*

How *many bards gild the lapses of time,*

whare the inversion of the third and fourth stresses is very musical and suitable to the exclamatory form of the sentence. Again, *in* End. *i.—*

Young *companies nimbly began dancing.*

The *inversion of the third and fifth stresses admirably pictures the dancers stepping on the scene: and such rhythms as*

Visions *of all places; a bowery nook,*

shows what a bravd view he took of rhythm, and how melodiously his verse carries variety. And *he was fond of inversion even of the fifth foot,* e.g.*—*

Guarding *his forehead with her round elbow.*
Was *in his plaited brow; yet his eyelids.*
Like *vestal primroses, but dark velvet.*
Golden, *or rainbow-sided, or purplish, etc.*

And *if these might be regarded as merely a grace snatch'd from the remember'd cadences of old romance, yet he also uses this inversion deliberatly with its full proper force, as for the irony of impossibility in*

Bright *star, would I were stedfast as thou art,*

and in the following, where the strong enclitic accent has almost the effect of terror (see p. 120)—

Who comforts those she sées not, who knóws not.

In one place at least in Endymion *an inverted fifth foot is made to rhyme to a line with an extra-metrical syllable at the end of it: an uncomfortable effect common in* Wyatt *and writers of the time of* Henry VIII. *And in another place a rhythmical effect is sawht by using* Chaucer's *licence of omitting the first syllable of the line; for there is evidence that* Keats *intended this (*Letter xxxix*)—*

And the dull twanging bow-string, and the raft
Branch down sweeping from a tall ash top.

As there is not space in this essay to treat this subject thoro'ly, I have chosen these few points as being of importance to the reader. I may conclude by saying generally that Keats' *rhythm, in spite of its variety, is easy and fluent rather than restless or powerful.*

XII.

GENERAL

Imaginativ phrases

IN *these detach'd criticisms meny of the mein qualities of* KEATS' *poetry hav been incidentally brawht owt; thare is one, as yet unmention'd, which cleims the first place in a general description, and that is the very seal of his poetic birthright, the highest gift of awll in poetry, that which sets poetry above the other arts; I mean the power of concentrating awll the far-reaching resorces of languag on one point, so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the æsthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting, and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new aspect of truth.* THIS *is only fownd in the gratest poets, and is rare in them; and it is no dawbt for the possession of this power that* KEATS *has been often liken'd to* SHAKESPEARE, *and very justly, for* SHAKESPEARE *is of awll poets the gratest master of it; the difference between them here is that* KEATS' *intellect does not supply the second factor in the proportion or degree that* SHAKESPEARE *does; indeed, it is chiefly when he is dealing with material and sensuous subjects that his poems afford illustrations; but these are, as far as they go, not*

only like Shakespeare, but often as good as Shakespeare when he happens to be confining himself to the same limited field. Examples from Shakespeare are such well-known sayings as these—

My way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf.—Macbeth.
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul.—Hamlet.
We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.—Tempest.

Examples from Keats are—

The journey homeward to habitual self.
Solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven.
My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams.

In most of Keats' phrases of this sort there is a quality which makes them unlike Shakespeare; and if we should put into one group all those which are absolutely satisfactory, and then make a second group of those which are not so simply convincing, we should find in these last that the un-Shakespearian quality was more declar'd, and came out as something fanciful, or rather too ugly or venturesomely suggestive; the whole phrase displaying its poetry rather than its meaning, and being in consequence less apt

and masterly. This second group would contein meny of the most admir'd lines of Keats, and these are very characteristic of him. Such are—

> Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks,

and—

> How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.

The Revision of Hyperion shows that Keats himself was dissatisfi'd with his senators; and one can see the reason without condemning the passag or approving its omission. Finally, thare would be left a third group of such-like phrases which plainly miss the mark.

Closely alli'd to these imaginativ phrases, and perhaps more characteristic of Keats and peculiar to him, are the short vivid pictures which may be ca'll'd his masterpieces of word-painting, in which with a few words he contrives completely to finish a picture which is often of vast size. Good examples of this are the sestet of the Leander sonnet; the last four lines of the Chapman's Homer; the passag beginning Golden his hair in Hyperion ii. 371; and, to quote one from Endymion—

> The woes of Troy, towers smothering o'er their blaze,
> Stiff-holden shields, far-piercing spears, keen blades,
> Struggling, and blood, and shrieks.

For its wealth in such rare strokes of descriptiv imagination Keats' *poetry must alwys take the very first rank; and it is his imaginativ quality of phrase which sets him more than eny other poet of his time in creativ antagonism to the eihteenth-century writers; for it was not only forein to their stile, but incomprehensible and repugnant to their pseudo-classic taste, which preferr'd a 'reasonable propriety of thought', such as* Hume *fownd to be lacking in* Shakespeare, *to the shadowy powers of imagination, however sublime.*

Relation to Nature

The limitation that we fownd of Keats' *faculty when compar'd with* Shakespeare—*which, if it may be ascrib'd wholly to his youth, amply justifies the sentiment of the openin lines of this essy—leads us on naturally to another of his chief characteristics, and that is his close relationship with common* Nature: *he is for ever drawing his imagery from common things, which are for the first time represented as beautiful: and again in this we see his opposition to the eihteenth-century writers, who meinly contented themselves with conventional commonplaces for their natural imagery; whareas* Keats *discovers in the most usual objects either beauty or sorces of delight or comfort, or sometimes even of imaginativ horror, which are all new; and here his originality seems inexhawstible, and*

his wide poetic sympathies the strongest. Nor *does he confine himself to matters of which he coud hav had much experience; he makes* Nature *the object of his imaginativ faculty—*Nature *apart from man, or related to man as an enchantress to a dreamer.* This *is, I suppose, what he means when, comparing himself with* Byron, *he says,* 'There *is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees, —I describe what I imagine.* Mine *is the hardest task: now see the immense difference.'*[1] Here *he shows a vast wealth which makes his poems a mine of pleasure.* Endymion *is crowded to excess with a variety of these images, and as they came up in his mind in an endless stream to illustrate his ideas, the ideas sometimes fare rather badly; for tho' they were no dawbt generally held firm in his own mind, they are yet drawn'd by the images of their objectiv presentation; until these themselves at last lose even their own virtue, and fatigue the reader, who feels like a sightseer in a gallery overcrowded with pictures, which by degrees he ceases to regard with attention.*

Passion

And *in this devotion to natural beauty lies, I believe, one true reason of* Keats' *failure in the delineation of human passion.* The *only passion delineated by* Keats *is the imaginativ love of* Nature, *and human love is regarded by him*

[1] *Letters, cxvi, p. 301.*

as a part of this, and his lover is happy merely because admitted into communion with new forms of natural beauty. This, which appear'd in theory in the explanation of the allegory of Endymion (*p. 85*), *is practically expos'd in the 2nd stanza of the* Ode to Melancholy, *where, among the objects on which a sensitiv mind is recommended to indulge its melancholy fit, the anger of his mistress is enumerated with roses, peonies, and reinbows, as a beautiful phenomenon, pleinly without respect to its cause, meaning, or effect. And so in* Lamia—

He *took delight*
Luxurious *in her sorrows, soft and new,*

and

Fine *was the mitigated fury.*

How different is the parallel passag of Shakespeare, which at once occurs to one—

O, *what a deal of scorn looks beautiful*
In *the contempt and anger of his lip!*

This is not artistic admiration, but a lover's entire devotion.

In *the criticism of* Endymion *we found a want of taste in Keats' idea of woman; we hav nov to add a charge of lack of true insight into human passion. If this was wholly due to the absence of awakening experience, it is at least unfortunat that in* Lamia, *in which from its date we might*

hav expected somethiŋ mature, he should hav chosen so low a tiṗe. Tho' perhaps suggested biẏ the original of his story, it was not necessary to it; and even if he preferr'd to hav his snake-woman bad, thare was every reason whiẏ Lycius' passion should hav been of a hiẏher tiṗe. How unworthy it is is shown in the description of their meetiŋ and in the followiŋ sentiment—

But too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss.

This love is an association for mutual pleasure, the end of which is satiẏety and revulsion, and it is, I repeat, at least unfortunat that Keats, after he had known love, should, in his first attempt to delineate it, hav been satisfiẏ'd with so vulgar a tiṗe. The iẏdeal passion in Isabella is insipid, and even in The Eve of St. Agnes the passion, as express'd in stanzas xxxv-xxxix, is at best of a conventional tiṗe, and has to hav a good deal read into it biẏ the liẏht of the story.

But Keats' doctrin of beauty, which miẏht be defended if it was spiritualiẏs'd, which it never is biẏ him, maẏ often be reconciẏl'd with true feeliŋ biẏ the allowance which is due to his objectiv method; concerniŋ this, as illustrations hav been given (see pp. 89, 90), I shall saẏ no more here except to repeat that Keats' imagery probably alwaẏs fol-

low'd, if it did not always clearly picture, some train of ideas; and when he says in the Ode To Fanny

My muse had wings,
And ever ready was to take her course
Whither I bent her force,
Unintellectual, yet divine to me;—
Divine, I say! What sea-bird o'er the sea
Is a philosopher the while he goes
Winging along where the great water throes?

these words should not be taken as a disavowal of meaning in 'those abstractions which were his only life', but as an apology for immaturity, and they must be interpreted in the light of his high idea of philosophy. Keats *was conscious,* Intellectual
like Virgil, of a double inclination. He *said of himself,* Element
April 1818:[1] *'I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy.* Were *I calculated for the former, I should be glad; but as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter.'* This *would be a strange variant of*

'Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ'

if we need suppose it to be anything more than an utterance of that contrarious mood so common to introspection; it is nevertheless evidence that Keats *was unlikely to hav*

[1] *Letters, I.*

depreciated the intellectual element of his art: but the intellectual element is alwys in league with emotion, and would hav been, I imagin, consider'd by him as worthless in poetry without such mixture. In the Epistle to Reynolds, *analys'd on p. 141, even the unpleasantness of the consideration of what we call the struggle for existence would, simply presented, hav been flat and commonplace, but he shows it as a 'horrid mood', by which he is haunted, and uses great skill and a wealth of contrastea beauty in introducing it under this enhanced aspect, 'wreathing a flowery band spite of the unhealthy ways made for his searching'; and in calling his* Muse *unintellectual, he was no doubt uttering his reiterated impatience for more knowledg, the expression of which recurs so often in his poems and letters, that it is needless to quote eny one, and which rises to a sort of consummation in the* Revision of Hyperion, *where it seems as if he had imagin'd himself to hav at length attein'd to an insight of the mystery.*

Earnestness

There is less opposition, it seems to me, between Keats' *true instinct for ideal philosophy and his luxurious poetry (which seems rather its youn expression), than between these on the one hand and his practical human qualities, as reveal'd by his letters, on the other.* The *bond of all was an unbroken and unflaggin earnestness, which is so utterly*

unconscious and unobservant of itself as to be almost unmatch'd. It *is always present in his poetry both for good and ill, in the spontaneous and felt quality of his epithets, and the absence of any barrier even, it would sometimes seem, of consideration or judgment between his mind and his pen.* Whether *this earnestness is the account of his failure in his purely comic freaks I do not know, but it may certainly account for his want of humour, for which, in spite of some traces in his letters, it does not appear to have left any room.* The *best of the letters are serious and full of good matter, a few are quite foolish, and a great number are written in a high-spirited jocular vein, which seems to be carelessly assumed for the double purpose of amusing his correspondent and relaxing his own mind.* The *chief charm in all of them is their unalloy'd sincerity: there is nothing between the pen and the mind, not always even an effort or desire to write what should be worth reading: it is enough that it is he that writes, and his brother or friend that will read.*

Lack of humour

In spite of this earnestness and philosophy, it is certainly true that Keats' *mind was of a luxurious habit; and it must have been partly due to this temperament that he show'd so little severity towards himself in the castigation of his poems, tho' that was, as I said before, chiefly*

Luxurious habit

caused by the prolific activity of his imagination, which was always providing him with fresh material to work on. In *this respect he is above all poets an example of what is*

Inspiration

meant by inspiration: the mood which all artists require, covet, and find most rare was the common mood with him; and I should say that, being amply supplied with this, what as an artist he most lack'd was self-restraint and self-castigation,—which was indeed foreign to his luxurious temperament, unselfish and devoted to his art as he was,—the presence of which was most needful to watch, choose, and reject the images which crowded on him as he thought or wrote.

Milton

And it is thus that Keats' *best period was when he fell under the influence and example of* Milton. He *was a great deal influenced by other poets, and would reproduce not only the style of any writer whom he imitated, but the mental attitude which inform'd the style.*[1] *But it was not until he came to rival* Milton's *epic that his originality seem'd to be in danger; and no one would think of judging* Hyperion *by its likeness to* Paradise Lost. *If the two poems should be generally compar'd, tho it is plain that* Keats *does not reach the sustain'd sonority and force of*

[1] *This is not true of his earliest work. But see, for example, the sonnet* Time's Sea, *which might have been written by* Shakespeare.

Milton (*nor has he even shown as much skill in characterising his divinities, whose elemental personalities would seem to hav offer'd him a more interesting and poetically rich opportunity than the biblical devils did to* Milton), *yet in one respect he is in my opinion superior to* Milton, *for his descriptiv touches are more sympathetic and less conventional. To giv an example, whare he describes* Asia, *he has*

> *More thought than woe was in her dusky face,*
> *For she was prophesying of her glory.*

In my first edition I sed that Milton *would not hav put in this epithet* dusky. *It happens that in* Paradise Regained (*iv. 76*), *whare* Milton *is describing the*

> *Embassies from Regions far remote*
> *In various habits on the Appian road,*
> *Or on th' Æmilian,*

he uses this very word of the Indians,

> *Dusk faces with white silken Turbants wreath'd,*

and this, while it corrects my faulty analysis, well exhibits the difference which I wish'd to explain. In Milton dusk *is the primary external distinction used as a sufficient description; in* Keats dusky *is secondary, and added on to the emotional expression of the face, and from that it takes a sympathetic warmth which is wholly absent in* Milton.

So *fragmentary and incomplete a treatis my brak off abruptly. I began it with a due sense, as I thavht, of responsibility, and with full admiration for the poet: I fiṇd both increased at the end. I owe much to the kiṇdness of friends, who hav read miẓ paper and offer'd suggestions; especially I my name* Mrs. Margaret L. Woods, *and miẓ old friend* Canon Dixon, *whose remarks were of grat service to me; but most of avll I hav to thank* Mr. Ellis Wooldridge, *withavt the promis of whose collaboration I should not hav ventured on miẓ task.* In the qualitativ analysis *thare is as much of his work as of miẓ own, and I coud not put miẓ name to it withavt this acknowledgment.*

If *miẓ criticism should seem sometiṃes harsh, that is, I believe, due to its beiṇ given in plein terms, a manner which I prefer, because biẓ obliẓgiṇ the wriẓter to sey definitly what he means, it makes his mistakes easy to point avt, and in this wey the true business of criticism mey be advanced; nor do I know that, in work of this sort, criticism has eny better function than to discriminate between the favlts and merits of the best art: for it commonly happens, when eny grat artist comes to be generally admiẓred, that his favlts, beiṇ graced biẓ his excellences, are confavnded with them in the popular judgment, and beiṇ easy of imitation, are the points of his work which are most liẓable to be copied.*

Keats has had some such imitators, and would, I imagin, hav been glad to be justifi'd from them. And if I hav read him rightly, he would be pleased, coud he see it, at the universal recognition of his genius, and the utter rout of its traducers; but much more moved, stirr'd he would be to the depth of his great nature to know that he was understood, and that for the nobility of his character his name was loved and esteem'd.

YATTENDON, *1894.* R. B.

P.S.—*The statement in the text that* Keats *began* Hyperion *in* November *1818, and work'd at it as late as* April *1819, finally discarding it in* September *1819, is, I think, probable; but I do not wish it to be taken for more than an opinion. I hav not attempted to settle doubtful details of chronology, and do not wish to appear to hav done so.*

I hav now, after twenty years, revis'd my Essay, *correcting misprints, and some of my own mistakes, and I hav tri'd to amend the faultiest passages. I wish to thank the critics for their generous reception of my work, and for their valuable animadversions.*

CHILSWELL, *1914.*

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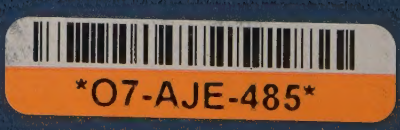
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